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How crazy was it for K to try to deploy MRBMs to Cuba?

The first thing that INR analysts addressed on October 16, when they learned of the deployment—before Rusk's first presentation to the ExComm—was, “Was this seen by the Soviets as a high-risk or a low-risk strategy?”

Their own earlier estimate (19 Sept. 62, as part of the USIB SNIE) that the Soviets were unlikely to do this reflected their beliefs that: 1) the Soviets had been cautious up until then, making threats but not taking actions that they estimated would involve high risk of war with the US, let alone nuclear war; (2) implicitly, they saw no reason—with respect to Cuba or Berlin or anything else—that would indicate that they were about to change this pattern of behavior; 3) Khrushchev would have (reasonably, realistically) estimated this deployment to involve high risk.

Did K conform to this last supposition? Did he regard what he was doing as involving high risk of war? If so, something was driving him to accept a high risk of war, perhaps nuclear war? What could that be? All anyone in the Excomm could profess to see, in open discussion (or any contemporary comments we have) was an urgent desire to even the strategic balance. Why just then? It must be because he was going to reopen (as he did predict, diplomatically) Berlin, hoping to drive us out.

Or did he, regard this as a low risk? Did that mean he had a low opinion of JFK's willingness to carry out any of his threats, his commitments regarding Cuba? Was that a result of their meeting at Vietnna? Or, of JFK's failure to send troops to Vietnam or Laos (much in the mind of the JCS: did K know?) or to knock down the Berlin Wall (as Clay wanted to do) or to respond to the ongoing buildup of Soviet weapons in Cuba?

Or did it mean an extremely unrealistic estimate by Khrushchev, a “crazy” view? Hardly more reassuring than a willingness to take high risks.

Bud Southard of CIA told me that the origin of his own highly classified study of the crisis in 1964 was a question set by his boss, John McCone: “Why did Khrushchev think he could get away with this?” (That was after (was the question in 1964, when Southard completed his study, or earlier in late 1962 or 1963?) K had failed to get away with it: as, it seemed, he “should” have foreseen.

McCone may have suspected that the answer lay in Kennedy's appearance of weakness. Sergei Khrushchev, in his books, like his father's memoirs which he transcribed, denied this. He said that Kennedy had made a good impression on his father at Vienna, and that he had no lack of respect for him (except for his inexperience). One the contrary—one might say—he feared before and during the

crisis that Kennedy might be unduly influenced by his military and the military-industrial complex that all capitalist presidents bent to. That wouldn't have led him to see the risks as low.

And yet, it appears he did. Why?

(top of my head, without references):

1. Once they were operational, JFK would just have to accept them, unhappily; he would get used to them "the way we have to live with the missiles in Turkey." (to someone).
2. Implicitly, it would be too dangerous—unthinkable—for JFK to attack operational missiles.

Never stated explicitly, to my knowledge. But: reasonable! This was precisely McNamara's attitudes, expressed in his opening comments and throughout. Thus, K could have been right. In fact, JFK seems almost certainly to have agreed with McNamara on this. His early response in favor of a surprise attack on the missiles lasted, I think (on the basis of the tapes, and other evidence) a day at most, which I think corresponded to the time for it to sink in that some of the missiles might already be operational.

However, the JCS disagreed with McNamara's premise that the attack was a feasible option until some of the missiles were operational. And McNamara's own anguish by the end of the next week, Oct. 27—he wasn't sure he would see another Saturday night—indicates he could at that point imagine being ordered by JFK to launch an attack on missiles that were then estimated to be operational.

LeMay urged that the next day, after K had announced he was removing the missiles. His rationale was that the Soviets might be hiding and continue to hide some missiles (though attacking the known ones would not solve that problem! Only continued surveillance and attack: or really, an invasion. (And would an invasion prevent the firing of missiles that had been hidden until then?)

But obviously, his fury and frustration—"We've been had!"—reflected his desire, along with all the Chiefs, to invade: with the best preparations and best excuse they ever would have.) (Again: against Soviet troops they didn't know were there—30,000 of them (over the 8-10,000 then estimated—armed with tac nuc weapons.)

The intelligence failure on the tac nucs, and K's inexplicable silence about them, were critical to the JCS and hawks' pressure on the

president to invade, as of October 26 and 28, and recurrently after that, on the issue (or pretext) of the Il-28s and reopening of AAA fire until November 30, a month later! (The tac nucs were still there!)

3. K really did seem to accept the fatheaded estimate of Gen. Biryuzov (sp) after his inspection trip (one day in the proposed site) that the missiles could be hidden from overhead reconnaissance "among the palm trees." This despite the fact that U-2s as well low-level recon (not a problem in the SU) could tell a missile from a palm tree even when it was on a launcher. And that most palm trees don't have launching vehicles under them, or fuel tanks and supporting equipment nearby. Nor do missiles look like palm trees in their usual, horizontal mode, nor do palm trees provide the cover of triple-canopy forest.

The Soviets later described this judgment as ridiculous and the general himself as an idiot. (A true case of a "crazy" judgment: though accepted in Moscow at the highest levels, and critical to the whole operation). But curiously, there doesn't seem to have been much criticism of this fatal judgment in Moscow at the time.

Was Soviet intelligence very involved in this conclusion, or was it a purely "military" judgment? Any experts on overhead reconnaissance or photography, if the SU had these? NO Caribbean experts seem to have been involved. Castro himself said later that he could have provided crucial help in disguising the process and missiles, if he had been at all consulted (i.e., he thought it could have been done, if done properly).

Others said that the Soviets were not generally good at camouflage (in contrast to their extraordinary comsec—communications security—throughout the land and ocean transport); though the generals in Cuba seemed to think they had done an adequate job (wrongly), and they do deny what Americans frequently said, that there was no camouflage effort at all. (E.g., there seems to have been netting over the horizontal missiles themselves in the earliest photos, though unaccountably, not over the associated equipment.)

One of the still-unresolved puzzles of the crisis was the absence or great inadequacy of the camouflage effort at first. The Soviets seem to put it down to simple incompetence. (In my study of 1964, I wondered whether it reflected great confidence that JFK would not reveal the missiles whenever he discovered them before the election: but that doesn't seem to be true, unless (see below) it was a subsidiary basis for confidence.)

4. Great confidence that the missiles would not be discovered in the transport phase, either to ports in the Soviet Union and from those ports to Cuba.

Our intelligence services would probably have regarded that confidence as "crazy," or high risk, or simply ignorant of our capabilities in SI (Comint and

Sigint), overhead recon by planes and satellites, and humint (human observers and agents, both in the Bloc (low) and Cuba (great). They wouldn't, I take it, have credited the Soviets, or perhaps anyone, with the comsec they actually exhibited.

(It was actually so disciplined and complete as to suggest that the inflated estimates of ICBMs by the Air Force and even CIA in 1958-61 **could** have been accurate, despite the lack of evidence from our surveillance: which was the basis for the correct estimates by the Army and Navy intelligence after 1958 that the Soviets had only "a few" ICBMs.

There was a case where the Rumsfeld/Cheney dictum, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" was mistaken." (As it usually would be; it's a fatheaded rule in their formulation. Of course, absence of evidence often or even usually *is* evidence of absence, if there's been any significant search for evidence. It's not *proof* of absence (if anything is; as noted during the crisis, "It's hard to prove a negative.")

It may not be *strong* evidence of absence. But in the case of the missile gap, and the total lack of WMDs in Iraq—both in face of an intense and comprehensive search for evidence, and multiple channels of surveillance—it *was* strong evidence, and the high officials who doubted it were simply wishful, and mistaken.

In the case of Cuba, though, while the absence of evidence of transport was just as strong evidence of absence as the cases above (again being in the face of a highest-priority search), it wasn't, one might say, strong enough to lead to an equally correct conclusion. The Rumsfeld dictum (in its corrected form) was supported.

And from the other side (the hiders vs. the finders, as Amrom Katz put it at RAND, in relation to covert nuclear testing) K's confidence on **that** point was, surprisingly, justified. Which makes the vulnerability they allowed in Cuba to overhead recon on the sites (after very good security in the phase of offloading the missiles in Cuba and even in moving them to the operational areas—despite, inevitably, some refugee reports, largely dismissed as sightings of SAMs) all the more puzzling and hard to explain. The period between the offloading of the missiles in Cuba and their full operational status was the second phase of the operation that would be vulnerable to action (air attack) by the US.

The earlier transport phase was regarded by all in Moscow to be the phase most vulnerable to action by the US—essentially a blockade, though also diplomatic pressure. Castro himself wanted the deployment to be open from start to finish, accompanied by declaration of a mutual defense pact. That would have made it all

look and be legal, and obviated the need for deception. But K accepted the judgment that the US would never “accept” or “allow” this. Presumably that meant they expected a blockade—**however illegal that would be for the US** (and whatever they thought of JFK’s resolution).

In other words, they expected JFK to act resolutely in an illegal and risky action—a blockade on the high seas, not in wartime—if they announced their intentions and tried to carry it out openly. The installation could only be done as a fait accompli, K and others believed. (This cuts against the inference that K thought JFK was in control of his military but personally weak.)

A US air attack later would be just as illegal; what would prevent that, K must have thought, was the operational status of the missiles., and the associated risks for the attacker. An armed encounter with a ship didn’t immediately raise risks of a nuclear explosion on a US city, nor immediate fears of escalation. Also, a blockade looks and starts out less violent than an attack, which would necessarily kill Soviet troops as well as others.

5. Castro, Raul and Che don’t seem to have considered the possibility that an announcement that the Soviets were committed to the defense of Cuba and intended to send troops, supporting equipment and even missiles, would have triggered an invasion of Cuba *before* any of this arrived! That certainly would have been demanded in Congress and the US public. And the Kennedy brothers were hardly resistant to this approach. They had called for updating of invasion plans in November (after doing so even earlier, in May, 1961, after the Bay of Pigs).

Northwoods—a whole list of covert actions that could serve as provocations or justifications for invasion—had been approved by the JCS and McNamara (and EGL) in March, well before the April-May decisions in Moscow and any possible declaration (urged later by Castro). It was **not** simply dismissed or rejected by Kennedy; in his meeting on the subject, he merely put military action aside for the time being. A public declaration by Moscow that they intended to set up a Soviet base in the Caribbean would have immediately called it into play.

Perhaps this was, after all, in the minds of those in Moscow who said that the US would never “accept” an open movement of missiles, though it wasn’t explicit.

But another puzzle does remain. Why didn’t K and his planners act as if they feared a possible invasion before the election in November? K’s plan was to complete the installation of the SS-4s just before the election (and the IRBMs, SS-5s, somewhat later, in December) and to announce their presence at the UN or in Cuba after the election, in early November. Why didn’t he show any worry that this might be too late: that the invasion he expected might come before that? (Especially, of course, if the missiles were discovered earlier; but even if not.)

That's ironic in view of the reality that the plans directed by McNamara on Oct. 2 for possible attack, blockade or invasion had a deadline for highest readiness of October 20. Indeed, Mongoose had had from the beginning a target of October, 1962. And the plans, even before October, are reported (by Polmar) to have a target date for planning of October (20?). (Obviously, before the election).

K presumably wouldn't have known this, but why wouldn't he have considered it a possibility? None of the Soviets, including K in his memoirs or his son, mention a Track II, in case either the missiles were discovered or there were strong indications of imminent invasion (those couldn't be entirely concealed by the Americans, though in the end they used an exercise as cover).

Even though presumably he couldn't speed up the operational status of the missiles, which were being deployed as fast as possible, he could have revealed at that point the presence of the tac nucs and the Soviet troops. He seems to have had no plans, provisionally, to do so: since he didn't reveal these even when that would have been intensely urgent after Oct. 22.

An odd lack, especially when there was so much publicity in the US about the materiel that was known to be arriving, and so much political pressure on JFK to do something about it. If he hadn't worried about a pre-election invasion at the outset, he should have realized that his own overt enhancement of Cuban defenses might possibly trigger it. Since he worried about invasion—the fundamental premise of all this—it should have been apparent that JFK would want an excuse, and that the overt parts of his own operation could be that excuse.

6. Now I come to a *possible* answer to these puzzles. In my 1964 study, I came to two connected hypotheses that might explain these odd phenomena. The wealth of later data has not directly supported either of them, yet it has not resolved the puzzles otherwise, either, nor has it directly contradicted the hypotheses.

First is the hypothesis that K thought that although invasion of Cuba was a live option for Kennedy—indeed, he thought it was almost certain to be attempted, unless he did something that might block it—he thought that Kennedy did not want to undertake it before the November 1962 election. This would have been an unreliable assumption, not an obvious, inevitable or compelling one. After all, I've just noted that McNamara directed urgent contingency planning for a pre-election invasion or blockade; but then, that was in the face of political pressure for it—especially if missiles did turn up, but even otherwise—caused by the overt Soviet supplies and “technicians” flowing in.

On the other side, JFK did show reluctance to make a commitment to invade throughout 1962, up to this point. He rejected Lansdale's premise of the need for overt US military commitment as a basis for his Mongoose planning, which was

directed to achieve covert effects in Cuba short of committing the US to direct involvement, though Lansdale coordinated Mongoose with simultaneous military contingency planning for invasion. He certainly showed (see below) a concern *not* to allow leaks of the possible presence of offensive weapons to add to the political pressures on him to invade. That's inconsistent with his *wanting* to invade before the election. So the belief I attribute to K, hypothetically, while undependable, would not clearly have been either incorrect or unreasonable. Not crazy.

Second, I inferred from a good deal of data not otherwise easy to explain, K might have believed that Kennedy would not only resist pressures to invade before the election based on the overt movement of "defensive" equipment (as Kennedy did do, in general and notably in his warnings against "offensive" weapons of Sept. 3 and Sept. 15) but that he would *attempt, successfully, to keep evidence or proof of the presence of the "offensive weapons" that he warned against secret from his political rivals and the American public until after the election (when K planned to reveal them himself).*

By then, they would be operational and, K presumed, safe from attack. A successful *fait accompli* would have been carried out (from the perspective of the American public and politicians) but with the reluctant and unhappy cooperation of President Kennedy.

Two aspects here of this hypothesis, which I expect to be unfamiliar, implausible, even bizarre. As a hypothesis, it was totally missing from the discussion when I arrived at it in 1964, and with only one exception it has been missing from every account since.¹ First, might Khrushchev have possibly thought this way? What is the evidence, if any? Second, might there have been any reality to such a (strange) supposition on his part?

On the second point: From 1956 to 1960—ending just two years before the Crisis—Khrushchev himself was aware (from radar) that the American U-2 was violating the airspace of the SU regularly, flying too high for Soviet AAA or Migs to intercept it. For those four years, K had kept that secret, from his own people and the international community, making no public protest (except related to the minor violations related to border violations by conventional reconnaissance planes, which were occasionally shot down by Soviet forces).

Meanwhile, President Eisenhower kept the secret as well. This despite the fact that he was recurrently under great pressure to demonstrate a basis for his apparent complacency about the Soviet arms race—especially after the test of a Soviet ICBM and the Sputniks indicated that they were ahead of us. Democrats including

¹ I'm struck by its single appearance in a relatively recent account by Michael Beschloss, in the context of discussion of Sergo Mikoyan. I had discussed this at length with Mikokan, who had not previously considered it and found it very interesting.

Senators Johnson and Symington and later JFK were working with USAF leaks about a “missile gap.” Eisenhower and his Defense Secretary Thomas Gates claimed—contrary to the Gaither Report and the Rockefeller Report (both counseled by my colleagues at the RAND Corporation)—that there was neither a missile gap nor a deterrence gap, but they refrained from giving any evidential basis for their reassurances. It would have been politically advantageous for Eisenhower to reveal that he was actually, unilaterally implementing his overt proposal of a mutual Open Skies agreement (rejected by the Soviets), with this bold, technically advanced operation.

He could have revealed further that he was developing a still more advanced satellite reconnaissance system, Corona—under cover of an overt Discover program, supposedly aimed mapping weather and geography—which would take over if the U-2 became vulnerable to Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) as occurred in 1960. But that too was under a compartmented clearance, Keyhole, even more closely held than the Talent clearance for U-2 photography. Neither of these systems—their very existence, as well their capabilities and output—were known at all to more than a handful of the 500 professionals at RAND, all of whom had Top Secret clearance.

But Eisenhower—as Khrushchev knew—kept both of these secrets, and kept them very effectively, for years, although they were known to scores if not hundreds of people in the policy process (while unknown to thousands of their colleagues) and to thousands or tens of thousands of military and intelligence operators and industrial contractors.

Why? Presumably to spare Khrushchev the “embarrassment” that he was technically and militarily incapable of defending his borders and airspace against this intrusion. To be sure, it was “only surveillance”—but the Soviet Union’s fundamental basis for its security had long been secrecy, and they had rejected all proposals for transparency. (And a high-flying plane like the U-2—though it couldn’t carry much payload, nor could the satellite at that point—could have been armed).

That was not just to be nice to Khrushchev, or because Ike wanted to secure his internal politics. Publicity would have forced him to complain internationally, at the UN, and perhaps to take counter-measures elsewhere to reciprocate. It would have complicated our relationships in unpredictable ways. It might have forced him to make an even greater crash effort to develop his SAMS (though that was probably moving with the highest priority anyway).

Still, none of these reasons were compelling enough, all together, to have forced Ike to keep that secret: yet, for whatever reason, he had. He had even lied about it when a SAM finally shot down Gary Powers and ended the program over the SU. (It continued elsewhere, including Cuba, for years: still unannounced and with high secrecy, even after the Corona satellites began operating). The revelation of the lie

by Khrushchev—who had at first concealed that he had Powers alive, encouraging Ike to lie, then announced it publicly—turned out to be costly to both sides. The first (!) public revelation of a presidential lie caused shock in the US and much discussion, not to the favor of Eisenhower's reputation (though not fatal either). And Eisenhower's refusal either to apologize or to promise an end to the flights (even though he did secretly end them) at the Paris Summit soon after led to the breakup of the Summit, amid Khrushchev's show of anger. There are strong indications that Eisenhower had intended to make significant concessions on Berlin at the Summit; so the timing of the revelation was not to Khrushchev's advantage after all.

Thus, K had surely learned something from this episode. In a supposedly open society, the US Government could keep a significant secret for years, despite many people knowing it. That he could do the same was no secret from anyone; but he knew that the US president knew that he knew...and that both of them could "trust" and rely on the other to keep a mutual secret from others which at least one of them could gain some political benefit from revealing.

That's a relationship. A kind of intimacy, shared by two heads of state supposedly in total opposition, unknown (in its nature, and in the very existence of such a "bond") to nearly everyone in their own governments and to virtually anyone in their publics.

A similar one was the existence of secret, direct correspondence between the two, supposedly more personal in nature, not subject to the usual, institutional coordination and consultation of their diplomatic messages and certainly not sent through normal diplomatic channels, very closely held at both sides (limiting drastically the number who would see it, or who might ask about it and ask to see it). Heads of two rival empires, ideological foes, players in a two-person zero-sum game: pen-pals!

The existence of such correspondence became known to journalists and the public with the leaks from the October 26, "long, rambling" message from Khrushchev to Kennedy. (I read that Friday night at the Pentagon, as it came in sections). During my study of nuclear crises in 1964, I was granted access to the "Eyes Only" vault at the State Department, a safe-like room with a table, for note-taking, and shelves lined with file-boxes on the shelves marked, among others, Kennedy-Khrushchev letters, Eisenhower-Khrushchev letters, Eisenhower-Bulganin letters.

I was able to look through these at will. Amazing stuff. Little truly personal, after all, but a heart-pounding experience to sit alone in that crypt, under fluorescent light, opening pages that had been held personally by the opposed heads of state, artifacts of relationships that were otherwise simply hard to imagine during the Cold War (still at its height as I read). What I was discovering, of course, was that the possibility of "back channel" communication between two such heads of state (like the "Nicky-Willy" letters between the cousins Tsar Nicholas and Kaiser

Wilhelm) had not ended with the First World War and had not begun with Khrushchev and Kennedy during the Missile Crisis.

The point here is that the very possibility, existence and channels of this correspondence, along with its contents, was a well-kept secret within each of the respective governments and from their publics, but known by each of the heads of state and known by each to be kept secret by the other. Another secret they shared, almost alone.

Such "back channel" communications, kept secret by each from high-level officials in their respective governments who would ordinarily expect to be involved in such inter-governmental communications but who might object to certain aspects of this (or who might inadvertently leak it to others who might object), played a key role in events leading up the crisis and during it. In theory, it could allow one of them to express something—a promise, a warning, a threat--with unusually high credibility that it reflected his personal conviction, commitment, honor and trustworthiness..

He might conceivably even reveal to the "adversary" domestic political or bureaucratic pressures and rivalries that he could not reveal to most of his own colleagues on pain of losing his own prestige and office. In America, there is a fundamental myth that considerations of domestic politics should not and do not influence foreign and defense policy. The reality that presidential decisions in those areas are in fact saturated with such considerations at all times is one of our most closely guarded secrets, almost *never* even alluded to in official, written communications, including transcripts, no matter the level of classification. Even these most-secret letters, being written, did not break with this rule. But oral back-channel, "unofficial" transmissions did so, in the crisis, as we'll see.

Khrushchev's son Sergei recalls that there was another aspect of the U-2 episode that influenced his father in the crisis: K's memory that Eisenhower had lied. "Lied to him," as Sergei recounted it: which Khrushchev saw as a precedent for his own lies through various back-channels, and publicly, to Kennedy about his intentions and then about the presence of missiles in Cuba. He actually seemed to think, as Sergei tells it, that these previous lies absolved his own deception, and should have ensured him against any real resentment by Kennedy.

If Sergei was right about this, he and his father both seemed to have missed crucial differences. Ike's lies were not to Khrushchev personally, they were asserted (first, through official statements and leaks) to the world, and the American public directly. (From the point of view of the government, they were "ordinary" lies to cover an intelligence operation; the surprising public reaction by the American public reflected the fact that it was the first time the truth had finally been acknowledged by the government itself).

Ike had not lied to Khrushchev in a personal message (as, in the State Department folders I examined in 1964). Those were supposed to be private and "candid,"

however much help each one got from aides in drafting them. K knew what he was doing when he told Georgi Bolshakov personally, along with Malinovsky, to tell RFK that they were not sending ground-to-ground missiles to Cuba that could reach the US. He meant that to be exceptionally influential on JFK's opinion, and it had that effect, causing those close to Kennedy to discount contrary evidence and rumors, even by their head of CIA, John McCone (who probably did not know of the Bolshakov channel or messages!) Likewise when Ambassador Dobrynin conveyed the same message to JFK personally, as a personal message from Khrushchev. Khrushchev seems not to have considered the effects this "abuse" of the private channels could be expected to have on the brothers' subsequent decision-making: discussed later.

6/5/12 [note later: I didn't review the above before writing what follows, so there's some repetition.]

But there were two peculiar aspects to the messages Khrushchev was sending to the Kennedys in the late summer and fall of 1962. Virtually every one of them referred –ostensibly, solicitously--to the upcoming Congressional elections in November. First, they assured Kennedy, through various recipients, that he would do nothing to make trouble for Kennedy before the election. As if he cared; as if they were, in some degree, partners, as if he shared an interest in Kennedy's fortunes in Congress.

What was very odd about that message was, as the third parties who were told this (RFK, Sorensen, Salinger(?), Thompson (?))—or Kennedy himself, when he heard this from Gromyko or Dobrynin-- all pointed out, he already *was* making trouble for Kennedy in the elections, lots of trouble, with the unprecedented flow of "defensive" equipment to Cuba (unmotivated, as far as the American public was aware). The Republicans were seizing on that as the main issue in the upcoming elections: the challenge to the U.S. to blockade that or respond to it, a challenge JFK appeared to be shirking.

What more *could* he do to embarrass the president before the elections—except send offensive ground-to-ground missiles, which, they were being assured, he wouldn't do? It seemed to be a promise without substantive content, hot air.

On the other hand, the same messages warned Kennedy that pressure from Moscow to settle the Berlin issue *was* coming shortly, right *after* the election, later in November. Gromyko put it most starkly: if there wasn't progress, Krushchev *would* sign a peace treaty with East Germany and the basis for Western troops in Berlin would be abrogated. They must leave Berlin, like a "rotten tooth that must be pulled out."

But why all these warnings, in August, September, October? Hadn't they been all through this just a year ago? How had the situation changed? Except that, on the one hand, the So viets' strategic inferiority had been exposed, and on the other, the Wall seemed to have resolved Khrushchev's most pressing problem. (Indeed, soon

after the missile crisis, Khrushchev told a visitor that after the Wall, he was "quite comfortable" with the German situation. It may have been sour grapes by that time, but it was plausible. Had he ever really meant to reopen the Berlin question in November—he didn't do it—or was that dependent on a different ending to the crisis?

Or might the warning have a different purpose—to help *bring about* a different ending to the missile crisis—which might or might not then be exploited in a new Berlin crisis? What if the meaning Khrushchev had intended Kennedy to understand retrospectively in these multiple, repetitive, cryptic messages—recalling them at the moment he might have become aware of evidence or proof that MRBMs were being installed in Cuba-- was: I won't make a crisis for you by *revealing* the presence of the offensive missiles before the election, *if you don't, either*. But *if you do, you'll have a Berlin crisis too*.

Further: "You're already being pressed to blockade Cuba. If you reveal publicly your evidence that we're constructing an offensive missile base in Cuba—that your September warnings have been ignored—that pressure will become immense. But if you then blockade Cuba, we blockade Berlin. If you invade and occupy Cuba, Berlin will be overrun and occupied. All this before your election, if and only if you make trouble for yourself by revealing your secretly-acquired intelligence. Do that and you won't just have one crisis—which you could have postponed or avoided-- you'll have *two* crises before the election."

The point of all this would be to deter Kennedy from confirming publicly whatever indications he have gained from refugees or surveillance before the election. That period—from early September to late October—corresponded precisely to the period of greatest vulnerability of the missiles after they arrived in Cuba, before they were operational.

Whichever side revealed them after that—Khrushchev's plan, and apparently, his expectation, was to do it himself in Cuba and the UN in November—they would pose too great a danger of launch under attack to be threatened or struck. There would be no crisis, because it would be too late for the US to do anything about them. It would be a successful *fait accompli*.

This was the hypothesis I came to in my study in 1964. It's not one that one would think of unless you were one of the few who knew—as I came to know at that time—that President Kennedy *had, in fact, taken extraordinary, unprecedented steps to keep secret* any bits of incoming intelligence that might suggest that his public warnings had been defied (see below).

Might Khrushchev have anticipated that very behavior—hoping by his combined reassurance-plus-warnings to encourage it—allowing Kennedy to keep the presence of offensive weapons, if he discovered them, secret until after the elections had passed? Hoping—if not counting on--that this "cooperative" behavior would

protect the missiles from attack during their most vulnerable phase after transport. What is clear is that, whether it was deliberate or not, that phase was scheduled to occur in the weeks just before the election.

If he counted on that to protect his *fait accompli*, he miscalculated. Indeed, it could have backfired badly, and almost did: either tipping Kennedy into an attack he would otherwise have avoided; or playing into his hands by giving him an election-winning crisis just before the voting.

Some Republicans, including Senator Norris Cotton, had been predicting just such an "October surprise," and he along with Senators Thomas Curtis and Barry Goldwater quickly interpreted Kennedy's speech and blockade as confirming that prediction and serving as a domestic political stratagem.

The urgent military contingency planning McNamara had directed on October 1 with a deadline for maximum readiness of October 20—if known by the Republicans—would have looked like smoking gun evidence of such intentions. And it does indicate serious presidential consideration of such an operation before the election, especially since the second in a list of events that might trigger it was discovery of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba. (The first was a Soviet move on Berlin: in case *that* reassurance, of no action before the election, should prove false!) 

So it might well have occurred to Khrushchev—though it doesn't seem to have done so-- that the prospect of an election might reinforce or speed up an attack on the missiles if they were discovered just before the election, rather than delay it. discovery of the missiles before the election—rather than being concealed-- might actually confirm or speed up an attack or invasion.

That's more or less what did happen; except that the discovery was delayed until it appeared that one or more of the missiles might already be operational. If U-2 flights had occurred throughout September—as the intelligence community, and McCone in particular, had urged—and the site-preparing and construction had been spotted two or three weeks earlier, perhaps even one week, Kennedy's initial inclination to destroy them very quickly would probably have been carried out. (Followed by an invasion, that would run into 42,000 Soviet troops and tactical nuclear weapons).

But was this course of events inevitable? Should Khrushchev have regarded it as highly probable, at least? (Mikoyan apparently did; but he seems to have been alone, at high levels). If Khrushchev, rather, entertained the contrary expectation above, such a hope would not have been as unreasonable as it would appear to the uninitiated.

As he knew, it was not only his own authoritarian system that could keep secrets—known to an adversary—from his own public and allies. It had been possible for Eisenhower, president in a democracy, to keep totally secret for long periods U.S.

covert activities—of which the U-2 program was only one—well known to the Soviets; and to keep secret results of those activities, the U-2 photos and what they revealed to him. He had kept these secret—even when it might have served him to reveal them--to avoid provoking unwelcome response from his adversary, who was also keeping the secret. And he had lied about them: knowing that his adversary knew he was lying. Why couldn't Kennedy do the same?

Well, in the first place, he couldn't keep *this* secret very long, no matter how closely it was guarded, with special clearances (which Kennedy did institute). He couldn't keep it the way that Eisenhower had been able to keep the U-2 (and Corona program) secret: because in those cases, the military and intelligence people who had the clearances and knew the secret had no incentive to reveal it. On the contrary, they would have expected that an international outcry if these programs were revealed would have led to cancelling them, which they didn't want.

(For the same reason, LBJ could later count on the secrets of the covert 34A operations against North Vietnam and the planning for air attacks on North Vietnam being kept very reliably by those who knew them—including his opponent Senator Barry Goldwater, who knew through his active duty service as a Reserve Air Force general, and the many others who preferred Goldwater's candidacy in 1964 and knew that it would be helped by these revelations—because they *wanted* the attacks to be “provoked” and to be carried out, rather than cancelled.

In this case, the secret, if revealed, would serve as the provocation the hawks needed, in the eyes of the public, to make pressure for an attack and invasion irresistible. That secret couldn't be kept for long without leaking, no matter how many special clearances were laid on. Not, especially, when the Director of Central Intelligence was a Republican, and a hawk. (The Kennedys may have underestimated McCone's institutional loyalty. He doesn't seem to have been the source of Senator Keating's assertions about missiles on October 10, though he was surely high on the list of suspects).

There is at least one report of the crisis (FIND THIS) that says that Kennedy's first question of McGeorge Bundy on October 16, on being told of the photos, was: “Can this be held until the election?” Three weeks? That may or may not be true. In any case Bundy told him—in answer to his question about leak-time, whether or not it took that precise form—that it was about a week, at most.²

As it was, Bundy and the Kennedys were pleasantly surprised that *this* secret (and their deliberations) held about that long, though *not* because no major secrets held up much longer. (The U-2 flights over Cuba themselves had already stayed secret

² (Would Kennedy have informed as many officials as he did—by constituting the ExComm, many of whom were already cleared for PSALM but several who were not, plus their immediate staffs—if he hadn't been given that short deadline?)

much longer; other matters in the crisis, such as JFK's openness to a trade of the Turkish missiles, remained secret for a quarter of a century).

Was K crazy to attempt to make Cuba a Soviet missile base and to protect Cuba from US invasion? As I see it, he came very close to achieving both. With "slightly" different tactics or circumstances, he could have won: either achieved both of these aims, keeping MRBMs (and ultimately many IRBMs) in Cuba and preventing invasion, or achieving a public trade of missiles in Turkey and Cuba, along with strong no-invasion and no-covert-action pledges from the US. (Perhaps, even limits on Guantanamo, or removal!)

Or, with a significantly different strategy—schedule of operations—he could have achieved the former, winning on both counts. (no trade)

Simply revealing the tac nucs and troops, either early after their arrival (and the arrival of missiles and warheads, to forestall blockade) or when invasion seemed imminent (Thursday, Friday, Saturday) would, I believe, have forestalled an invasion, permanently. And done so, for the long run, better than any US guarantee could do. K's failure to plan to do this, and his actual failure to do it, are *both* inexplicable: verging on **crazy**, though it seems to have been an approach that drew no criticism from the Presidium or Soviet military.

(Definitely crazy: deploying them there—initially with delegated authorization to use them, later with ambiguous or unreliable control—*without* revealing them to the US, not only, in the actual event, lost the crisis for Khrushchev; it could have led to general war, the annihilation of Cuba and Soviet forces and a first-strike by the US (after first-use by Soviets in Cuba) against the SU. This could well have occurred if shooting, first by Castro then by the US, had gotten underway before K had withdrawn. This could have happened on Saturday, and would have, if JFK had not overridden virtually all of his advisors.

Though: striking a single SAM site, as most advised that night, would probably not have set off the whole escalation, by itself. It would simply have hastened K's retreat, or reinforced his determination to retreat that he had already decided on.

It's not even clear to me why JFK did decide against this. Was he afraid that killing some Soviets would harden K against any deal, such as he was proposing through RFK? It could be argued equally well that it would increase the chances of K's making a deal. That is probably true, given that K knew he had not ordered the SAM shootdown, and was understandably worried that it would result in at least a limited US response.

However, none of the ExComm realized that. They saw the SAM attack as an escalation by K; accompanying his "harder line" on Turkey (actually, a response to an offer by RFK and JFK, which ExComm didn't know. That offer was given, Thursday night, before receiving the "softer offer" of K on Friday night.) So JFK,

agreeing with this, may have thought that if he was still going to try to achieve a better deal than the public trade—if he was going to try to get the Friday night deal (the final outcome) by adding a sweetener of a private trade—he couldn't afford to kill any Soviets at a SAM site. (If the shooting had been by Cubans—as K thought it was!—and JFK had known that, he might well have attacked a Cuban site, especially if it could have been identified as the one that had attacked the US plane).

Revealing the tac nucs would not, by itself, protect the MRBMs from air attack. The uncertainty as to whether one or more might be operational did do that—with respect to JFK and McNamara—though not in the eyes of the hawks or the JCS. But that was a result of the unpredictable failure of the US to discover them prior to Oct. 14. Accepting the risk of an earlier discovery was the most “questionable” aspect of K’s decisions, bordering on crazy, certainly reckless: given what he actually did.

Even so, he almost won that gamble. (So, it wasn’t “inevitable” that he would lose as he did, or worse, bring on general war. It wasn’t even, probably, as risky as Mikoyan thought it was, initially. But Mikoyan certainly wasn’t off base.) Given the crisis up through Saturday, JFK was ready to give in to the public trade and no-invasion pledge, a considerable victory for K strategically (say, going into a Berlin negotiation, with NATO and US leadership weakened, NATO confidence in US determination over Berlin greatly weakened: even though no change in the strategic balance, a general appreciation that it did not amount to significant superiority for the US, given the outcome! (I.e., the way that JFK and McNamara actually thought, in opposition to the JCS and perhaps Nitze).

If K could have persuaded Castro to cease firing on American recon on Sunday (and Monday), if he could have felt confident that would hold, then he could and probably would have replied to RFK’s Saturday night offer (and JFK’s letter) by reiterating his demand for a public trade, made Saturday morning (which JFK so far was ignoring). And JFK would have yielded: to U Thant, who (induced by JFK/Cordier) would have made the same proposal.

That would have been difficult, not certain: Castro was adamant. But surely not impossible. (“Negotiation is going on; downing another American plane will prejudice it dangerously. You’ve got to give me this.”) Hmmn. Saturday night is certainly too late for that. During the day Saturday (evening in Moscow) would give it a chance. Better, before the firing at all, Friday night (Saturday morning in Moscow). But wait a minute: K didn’t want to tell Castro he was “negotiating,” especially for a public trade of the missiles (unless, perhaps, he could have emphasized that the tac nucs and troops would remain: the missiles were between him and the US, not essential to protecting Cuba), or merely for a “pledge” from the US (that wasn’t either sufficient, nor necessary if the tac nucs would remain!) (The real issue of how Cuba was to be defended wasn’t part of the dialog between the US and USSR, since the US didn’t know about the tac nucs and K didn’t tell them!)

(Why, after all, were tac nuks so strong for defending Cuba? Precisely because of the risk or likelihood that they would be used “crazily, suicidally” either by Soviet units, even against orders, or by Cubans if they controlled them. This behavior was not merely possible—credible—but actually likely! As in Europe, with NATO tac nuks (and for that matter, Soviet tac nuks: as Ike saw it, probably correctly).

This is “normal, predictable, human craziness” in our species. It seems, for at least many “responsible, powerful” human officials (the military, some civilians), to hold even when the result is not merely suicidal but omnicidal. That prospect does not ensure that threats to bring it about are total bluffs or wholly incredible, nor that bluffs will not lead to catastrophe.

That’s why nuclear threats—even against a NWS, or an ally of an NWS—*are* credible, usable, and are used (at great risk): contrary to those who regard them as usable only to deter nuclear attack. (As NATO under Ike put it: nuclear response to nuclear attack is “automatic”: against non-nuclear challenge, a matter of decision by political authorities, if time and communications permit.)

10:33 AM

Wednesday, June 6, 12: notes.

[Cline interview. Mikoyan. Beschloss. Why it may have reduced K's sense of risk. What Gromyko may have inferred from failure of JFK to confront him or ask pointed questions: either he knew—and ploy was working—or he didn't know, yet. Likewise from Sept. 13 warning (despite Sept. 11 alert). (Warning, only, may have reassured rather than alarmed! If they thought he did know already!) Why delay in recon? What Cline and Sorensen thought about Sept. 3 warning; McNamara on that. (Check hsr report). Effect of McCone: there and not there.)

JFK may have kept secret in order to have October surprise; (not to keep secret until after election).

"We won't move on Berlin before the election—UNLESS something comes up." (But why then say they will move after election—apparently, even if JFK doesn't start something before the election? Then he doesn't have so much to lose if he moves even before the election: that's the way that RFK and others did reason. K definitely doesn't seem to have foreseen how his deception would enrage the Kennedys: though in the end, that didn't affect their action all that much (if, as I believe, JFK meant to give in, anyway): except to make their initial preparations for invasion so plausible as to frighten Castro and K.

Wednesday, June 6, 12, 8:45 AM

Psalm system (and Funnel): how it misled JFK. (Hence? Delay in U-2 until Oct. 9 (JCS probably convinced missiles by Oct. 1 at latest). Decision not to attack Cuba for 3 months, "unless": Oct. 15. If discovered a week or more earlier... (see file on Secrecy)

(see file on crazy choices) 6/6/12 9:04 AM

[Not all "greatly, tragically mistaken" premises/decisions are "crazy." Were those leading up to WWI crazy? All of them? Which ones? (No one, for example, foresaw the resilience of the economies, chance of prolonged war; or effects of machine-guns (except Ivan ...?) , trenches...)]

K's choices leading up to C-II were somewhat reckless (lack of "exit strategy" if discovered, no Track II) but were they crazy? I'm arguing: not as much as appeared; not clearly crazy (they almost won! Missiles were NOT discovered until at least one might be operational: that was enough to stop JFK, privately, though not others: including the VP, who DID become president one year later! (See RFK on the half dozen who would have blown up the world. Including Dillon, who JFK was willing to see president! McCone? (head of CIA, earlier AEC;) (not, McN, R; Bundy?) Not the JCS! (As usual, mad dogs).

I say, crazy: go to general war (or any significant chance of it) over Berlin; or Cuba. Twining was ready over Berlin in 1958. Several agreed in Cuba 1962: if Berlin blocked, general war. Writing off Europe!

(Trachtenberg: Dulles in 1958: not one chance in a thousand Soviets would go up to general war: i.e., force us with a choice of backdown or general war, no other option. Like JFK, 1/3-1/2 in Cuba. Dulles: like hsr in Cuba; more or less, me. Dillon, he claims. Was that crazy?

An underestimation of the chance that, once any shooting starts, events will propel toward ultimate "mad" decisions? Underestimation of nationalism, "death before dishonor" (MT: Ike's "soldierly ethic"): Castro was tested on this: a head of state faced with choice of general war or occupation, "controlling" nuclear weapons: actually, not in direct control, but with full confidence that an ally would use the weapons on his territory (as NATO was supposed to "trust" the US to use its nucs on their territory). On Friday night, Saturday night, he expected invasion, and proposed preemption when it was imminent. (He may or may not have been right that most Cubans would agree with him! *Patria o muerte!*)

But with "general war": it's not on the death of yourself, or your squad or military unit (Ike proposed to test on Berlin with one division, before GW). It's death for your nation; but with nuclear weapons, death for enemy nation, women, children, sick, old, infants, doctors, shoemakers and shoe salesmen. But also for your allies. And neutrals. (100 million in West Europe: depending on which way the wind blows. Gavin? To congress). A quarter of the earth's surface and population (actually, all: but they hadn't thought of that) (didn't look at fire at all—not so rational—or, "where there's fire, there's smoke," sometimes more than others (cities, vs. isolated missile sites). Half of one (northern) hemisphere: not the US (or south: LA...). A billion or more humans.

Their death, before your (leader's) dishonor. Before you fail to carry out your commitments to protect Berlin (or Cuba), by terrorist threat, break your promise, betray your ally, show cowardice (or shrink from enacting terrorism, on enemy people. See US current issue: does president authorize drone strike, when a high-value target is accompanied by his family?)

But K was also tested; in that same night, he offered Friday-night deal. (Would he even have demanded no-invasion pledge? Friday, when he sent the proposal, Moscow time, there hadn't been the SAM shooting or the AAA: he didn't have evidence that local forces, Soviet and Cuban, were out of his control. (Or, subs; when, if ever, did he learn of this during the crisis?) (or the U-2 over Siberia; did they pick up Vandenberg firing?) So he had hours, at least, of bargaining time with DC (they have to be awake, too).

As soon as that eased up, he began bargaining. Wouldn't he have done that on Sunday, if he felt local forces were in control? And he would have won.

See, in Trachtenberg, choices US/NATO faced in "protecting" West Berlin. Were they not an exact counterpart to what Khrushchev faced with respect to Cuba?

(Was there consideration, before C-II, of giving nuclear weapons to Germany? (Exactly what K sought to forestall! Wasn't he in danger of provoking just that?) Was there consideration of threatening that?! (privately, to Khrushchev? E.g., in Vienna, or later in 1961? Or as a threat, in C-II? Instead, RFK just considered doing it: even to Berlin! As K did, in Cuba: secretly! But Cuba required, to be invaded, a buildup of a huge invasion force: not needed to overrun Berlin. How much did US/NATO worry about a simple takeover in Berlin, rather than blocking access? Say, by East Germans! "General war"? (It wouldn't involve two brigades of US, or would it?) (Did Soviets ever, for a moment, consider doing that? Or really blocking access? Do we know, for Khrushchev, **their** Berlin contingency planning, at any point: 1958-62?

Thursday, May 31, 2012
1:22 PM

How crazy was it for K to try to deploy MRBMs to Cuba?

The first thing that INR analysts addressed on October 16, when they learned of the deployment—before Rusk's first presentation to the ExComm—was, “Was this seen by the Soviets as a high-risk or a low-risk strategy?”

Their own earlier estimate (19 Sept. 62, as part of the USIB SNIE) that the Soviets were unlikely to do this reflected their beliefs that: 1) the Soviets had been cautious up until then, making threats but not taking actions that they estimated would involve high risk of war with the US, let alone nuclear war; (2) implicitly, they saw no reason—with respect to Cuba or Berlin or anything else—that would indicate that they were about to change this pattern of behavior; 3) Khrushchev would have (reasonably, realistically) estimated this deployment to involve high risk.

Did K conform to this last supposition? Did he regard what he was doing as involving high risk of war? If so, something was driving him to accept a high risk of war, perhaps nuclear war? What could that be? All anyone in the Excomm could profess to see, in open discussion (or any contemporary comments we have) was an urgent desire to even the strategic balance. Why just then? It must be because he was going to reopen (as he did predict, diplomatically) Berlin, hoping to drive us out.

Or did he, regard this as a low risk? Did that mean he had a low opinion of JFK's willingness to carry out any of his threats, his commitments regarding Cuba? Was that a result of their meeting at Vietnna? Or, of JFK's failure to send troops to Vietnam or Laos (much in the mind of the JCS: did K know?) or to knock down the Berlin Wall (as Clay wanted to do) or to respond to the ongoing buildup of Soviet weapons in Cuba?

Or did it mean an extremely unrealistic estimate by Khrushchev, a “crazy” view? Hardly more reassuring than a willingness to take high risks.

Bud Southard of CIA told me that the origin of his own highly classified study of the crisis in 1964 was a question set by his boss, John McCone: “Why did Khrushchev think he could get away with this?” (That was after (was the question in 1964, when Southard completed his study, or earlier in late 1962 or 1963?) K had failed to get away with it: as, it seemed, he “should” have foreseen.

McCone may have suspected that the answer lay in Kennedy's appearance of weakness. Sergei Khrushchev, in his books, like his father's memoirs which he transcribed, denied this. He said that Kennedy had made a good impression on his father at Vienna, and that he had no lack of respect for him (except for his inexperience). One the contrary—one might say—he feared before and during the

crisis that Kennedy might be unduly influenced by his military and the military-industrial complex that all capitalist presidents bent to. That wouldn't have led him to see the risks as low.

And yet, it appears he did. Why?

(top of my head, without references):

1. Once they were operational, JFK would just have to accept them, unhappily; he would get used to them “the way we have to live with the missiles in Turkey.” (to someone).
2. Implicitly, it would be too dangerous—unthinkable—for JFK to attack operational missiles.

Never stated explicitly, to my knowledge. But: reasonable! This was precisely McNamara’s attitudes, expressed in his opening comments and throughout. Thus, K could have been right. In fact, JFK seems almost certainly to have agreed with McNamara on this. His early response in favor of a surprise attack on the missiles lasted, I think (on the basis of the tapes, and other evidence) a day at most, which I think corresponded to the time for it to sink in that some of the missiles might already be operational.

However, the JCS disagreed with McNamara’s premise that the attack was a feasible option until some of the missiles were operational. And McNamara’s own anguish by the end of the next week, Oct. 27—he wasn’t sure he would see another Saturday night—indicates he could at that point imagine being ordered by JFK to launch an attack on missiles that were then estimated to be operational.

LeMay urged that the next day, after K had announced he was removing the missiles. His rationale was that the Soviets might be hiding and continue to hide some missiles (though attacking the known ones would not solve that problem! Only continued surveillance and attack: or really, an invasion. (And would an invasion prevent the firing of missiles that had been hidden until then?)

But obviously, his fury and frustration—“We’ve been had!”—reflected his desire, along with all the Chiefs, to invade: with the best preparations and best excuse they ever would have.) (Again: against Soviet troops they didn’t know were there—30,000 of them (over the 8-10,000 then estimated—armed with tac nuc weapons.)

The intelligence failure on the tac nucs, and K’s inexplicable silence about them, were critical to the JCS and hawks’ pressure on the

president to invade, as of October 26 and 28, and recurrently after that, on the issue (or pretext) of the Il-28s and reopening of AAA fire until November 30, a month later! (The tac nucs were still there!)

3. K really did seem to accept the fatheaded estimate of Gen. Biryuzov (sp) after his inspection trip (one day in the proposed site) that the missiles could be hidden from overhead reconnaissance "among the palm trees." This despite the fact that U-2s as well low-level recon (not a problem in the SU) could tell a missile from a palm tree even when it was on a launcher. And that most palm trees don't have launching vehicles under them, or fuel tanks and supporting equipment nearby. Nor do missiles look like palm trees in their usual, horizontal mode, nor do palm trees provide the cover of triple-canopy forest.

The Soviets later described this judgment as ridiculous and the general himself as an idiot. (A true case of a "crazy" judgment: though accepted in Moscow at the highest levels, and critical to the whole operation). But curiously, there doesn't seem to have been much criticism of this fatal judgment in Moscow at the time.

Was Soviet intelligence very involved in this conclusion, or was it a purely "military" judgment? Any experts on overhead reconnaissance or photography, if the SU had these? NO Caribbean experts seem to have been involved. Castro himself said later that he could have provided crucial help in disguising the process and missiles, if he had been at all consulted (i.e., he thought it could have been done, if done properly).

Others said that the Soviets were not generally good at camouflage (in contrast to their extraordinary comsec—communications security—throughout the land and ocean transport); though the generals in Cuba seemed to think they had done an adequate job (wrongly), and they do deny what Americans frequently said, that there was no camouflage effort at all. (E.g., there seems to have been netting over the horizontal missiles themselves in the earliest photos, though unaccountably, not over the associated equipment.)

One of the still-unresolved puzzles of the crisis was the absence or great inadequacy of the camouflage effort at first. The Soviets seem to put it down to simple incompetence. (In my study of 1964, I wondered whether it reflected great confidence that JFK would not reveal the missiles whenever he discovered them before the election: but that doesn't seem to be true, unless (see below) it was a subsidiary basis for confidence.)

4. Great confidence that the missiles would not be discovered in the transport phase, either to ports in the Soviet Union and from those ports to Cuba.

Our intelligence services would probably have regarded that confidence as "crazy," or high risk, or simply ignorant of our capabilities in SI (Comint and

Sigint), overhead recon by planes and satellites, and humint (human observers and agents, both in the Bloc (low) and Cuba (great). They wouldn't, I take it, have credited the Soviets, or perhaps anyone, with the comsec they actually exhibited.

(It was actually so disciplined and complete as to suggest that the inflated estimates of ICBMs by the Air Force and even CIA in 1958-61 **could** have been accurate, despite the lack of evidence from our surveillance: which was the basis for the correct estimates by the Army and Navy intelligence after 1958 that the Soviets had only "a few" ICBMs.

There was a case where the Rumsfeld/Cheney dictum, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence" was mistaken." (As it usually would be; it's a fatheaded rule in their formulation. Of course, absence of evidence often or even usually *is* evidence of absence, if there's been any significant search for evidence. It's not *proof* of absence (if anything is; as noted during the crisis, "It's hard to prove a negative.")

It may not be *strong* evidence of absence. But in the case of the missile gap, and the total lack of WMDs in Iraq—both in face of an intense and comprehensive search for evidence, and multiple channels of surveillance—it *was* strong evidence, and the high officials who doubted it were simply wishful, and mistaken.

In the case of Cuba, though, while the absence of evidence of transport was just as strong evidence of absence as the cases above (again being in the face of a highest-priority search), it wasn't, one might say, strong enough to lead to an equally correct conclusion. The Rumsfeld dictum (in its corrected form) was supported.

And from the other side (the hiders vs. the finders, as Amrom Katz put it at RAND, in relation to covert nuclear testing) K's confidence on **that** point was, surprisingly, justified. Which makes the vulnerability they allowed in Cuba to overhead recon on the sites (after very good security in the phase of offloading the missiles in Cuba and even in moving them to the operational areas—despite, inevitably, some refugee reports, largely dismissed as sightings of SAMs) all the more puzzling and hard to explain. The period between the offloading of the missiles in Cuba and their full operational status was the second phase of the operation that would be vulnerable to action (air attack) by the US.

The earlier transport phase was regarded by all in Moscow to be the phase most vulnerable to action by the US—essentially a blockade, though also diplomatic pressure. Castro himself wanted the deployment to be open from start to finish, accompanied by declaration of a mutual defense pact. That would have made it all

look and be legal, and obviated the need for deception. But K accepted the judgment that the US would never “accept” or “allow” this. Presumably that meant they expected a blockade—**however illegal that would be for the US** (and whatever they thought of JFK’s resolution).

In other words, they expected JFK to act resolutely in an illegal and risky action—a blockade on the high seas, not in wartime—if they announced their intentions and tried to carry it out openly. The installation could only be done as a fait accompli, K and others believed. (This cuts against the inference that K thought JFK was in control of his military but personally weak.)

A US air attack later would be just as illegal; what would prevent that, K must have thought, was the operational status of the missiles., and the associated risks for the attacker. An armed encounter with a ship didn’t immediately raise risks of a nuclear explosion on a US city, nor immediate fears of escalation. Also, a blockade looks and starts out less violent than an attack, which would necessarily kill Soviet troops as well as others.

5. Castro, Raul and Che don’t seem to have considered the possibility that an announcement that the Soviets were committed to the defense of Cuba and intended to send troops, supporting equipment and even missiles, would have triggered an invasion of Cuba *before* any of this arrived! That certainly would have been demanded in Congress and the US public. And the Kennedy brothers were hardly resistant to this approach. They had called for updating of invasion plans in November (after doing so even earlier, in May, 1961, after the Bay of Pigs).

Northwoods—a whole list of covert actions that could serve as provocations or justifications for invasion—had been approved by the JCS and McNamara (and EGL) in March, well before the April-May decisions in Moscow and any possible declaration (urged later by Castro). It was **not** simply dismissed or rejected by Kennedy; in his meeting on the subject, he merely put military action aside for the time being. A public declaration by Moscow that they intended to set up a Soviet base in the Caribbean would have immediately called it into play.

Perhaps this was, after all, in the minds of those in Moscow who said that the US would never “accept” an open movement of missiles, though it wasn’t explicit.

But another puzzle does remain. Why didn’t K and his planners act as if they feared a possible invasion before the election in November? K’s plan was to complete the installation of the SS-4s just before the election (and the IRBMs, SS-5s, somewhat later, in December) and to announce their presence at the UN or in Cuba after the election, in early November. Why didn’t he show any worry that this might be too late: that the invasion he expected might come before that? (Especially, of course, if the missiles were discovered earlier; but even if not.)

That's ironic in view of the reality that the plans directed by McNamara on Oct. 2 for possible attack, blockade or invasion had a deadline for highest readiness of October 20. Indeed, Mongoose had had from the beginning a target of October, 1962. And the plans, even before October, are reported (by Polmar) to have a target date for planning of October (20?). (Obviously, before the election).

K presumably wouldn't have known this, but why wouldn't he have considered it a possibility? None of the Soviets, including K in his memoirs or his son, mention a Track II, in case either the missiles were discovered or there were strong indications of imminent invasion (those couldn't be entirely concealed by the Americans, though in the end they used an exercise as cover).

Even though presumably he couldn't speed up the operational status of the missiles, which were being deployed as fast as possible, he could have revealed at that point the presence of the tac nucs and the Soviet troops. He seems to have had no plans, provisionally, to do so: since he didn't reveal these even when that would have been intensely urgent after Oct. 22.

An odd lack, especially when there was so much publicity in the US about the materiel that was known to be arriving, and so much political pressure on JFK to do something about it. If he hadn't worried about a pre-election invasion at the outset, he should have realized that his own overt enhancement of Cuban defenses might possibly trigger it. Since he worried about invasion—the fundamental premise of all this—it should have been apparent that JFK would want an excuse, and that the overt parts of his own operation could be that excuse.

6. Now I come to a *possible* answer to these puzzles. In my 1964 study, I came to two connected hypotheses that might explain these odd phenomena. The wealth of later data has not directly supported either of them, yet it has not resolved the puzzles otherwise, either, nor has it directly contradicted the hypotheses.

First is the hypothesis that K thought that although invasion of Cuba was a live option for Kennedy—indeed, he thought it was almost certain to be attempted, unless he did something that might block it—he thought that Kennedy did **not** want to undertake it before the November 1962 election. This would have been an unreliable assumption, not an obvious, inevitable or compelling one. After all, I've just noted that McNamara directed urgent contingency planning for a pre-election invasion or blockade; but then, that was in the face of political pressure for it—especially if missiles did turn up, but even otherwise—caused by the overt Soviet supplies and “technicians” flowing in.

On the other side, JFK did show reluctance to make a commitment to invade throughout 1962, up to this point. He rejected Lansdale's premise of the need for overt US military commitment as a basis for his Mongoose planning, which was

directed to achieve covert effects in Cuba short of committing the US to direct involvement, though Lansdale coordinated Mongoose with simultaneous military contingency planning for invasion. He certainly showed (see below) a concern *not* to allow leaks of the possible presence of offensive weapons to add to the political pressures on him to invade. That's inconsistent with his *wanting* to invade before the election. So the belief I attribute to K, hypothetically, while undependable, would not clearly have been either incorrect or unreasonable. Not crazy.

Second, I inferred from a good deal of data not otherwise easy to explain, K might have believed that Kennedy would not only resist pressures to invade before the election based on the overt movement of "defensive" equipment (as Kennedy did do, in general and notably in his warnings against "offensive" weapons of Sept. 3 and Sept. 15) but that he would *attempt, successfully, to keep evidence or proof of the presence of the "offensive weapons" that he warned against secret from his political rivals and the American public until after the election (when K planned to reveal them himself)*.

By then, they would be operational and, K presumed, safe from attack. A successful *fait accompli* would have been carried out (from the perspective of the American public and politicians) but with the reluctant and unhappy cooperation of President Kennedy.

Two aspects here of this hypothesis, which I expect to be unfamiliar, implausible, even bizarre. As a hypothesis, it was totally missing from the discussion when I arrived at it in 1964, and with only one exception it has been missing from every account since.¹ First, might Khrushchev have possibly thought this way? What is the evidence, if any? Second, might there have been any reality to such a (strange) supposition on his part?

On the second point: From 1956 to 1960—ending just two years before the Crisis—Khrushchev himself was aware (from radar) that the American U-2 was violating the airspace of the SU regularly, flying too high for Soviet AAA or Migs to intercept it. For those four years, K had kept that secret, from his own people and the international community, making no public protest (except related to the minor violations related to border violations by conventional reconnaissance planes, which were occasionally shot down by Soviet forces).

Meanwhile, President Eisenhower kept the secret as well. This despite the fact that he was recurrently under great pressure to demonstrate a basis for his apparent complacency about the Soviet arms race—especially after the test of a Soviet ICBM and the Sputniks indicated that they were ahead of us. Democrats including

¹ I'm struck by its single appearance in a relatively recent account by Michael Beschloss, in the context of discussion of Sergo Mikoyan. I had discussed this at length with Mikokan, who had not previously considered it and found it very interesting.

Senators Johnson and Symington and later JFK were working with USAF leaks about a “missile gap.” Eisenhower and his Defense Secretary Thomas Gates claimed—contrary to the Gaither Report and the Rockefeller Report (both counseled by my colleagues at the RAND Corporation)—that there was neither a missile gap nor a deterrence gap, but they refrained from giving any evidential basis for their reassurances. It would have been politically advantageous for Eisenhower to reveal that he was actually, unilaterally implementing his overt proposal of a mutual Open Skies agreement (rejected by the Soviets), with this bold, technically advanced operation.

He could have revealed further that he was developing a still more advanced satellite reconnaissance system, Corona—under cover of an overt Discover program, supposedly aimed mapping weather and geography—which would take over if the U-2 became vulnerable to Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) as occurred in 1960. But that too was under a compartmented clearance, Keyhole, even more closely held than the Talent clearance for U-2 photography. Neither of these systems—their very existence, as well their capabilities and output—were known at all to more than a handful of the 500 professionals at RAND, all of whom had Top Secret clearance.

But Eisenhower—as Khrushchev knew—kept both of these secrets, and kept them very effectively, for years, although they were known to scores if not hundreds of people in the policy process (while unknown to thousands of their colleagues) and to thousands or tens of thousands of military and intelligence operators and industrial contractors.

Why? Presumably to spare Khrushchev the “embarrassment” that he was technically and militarily incapable of defending his borders and airspace against this intrusion. To be sure, it was “only surveillance”—but the Soviet Union’s fundamental basis for its security had long been secrecy, and they had rejected all proposals for transparency. (And a high-flying plane like the U-2—though it couldn’t carry much payload, nor could the satellite at that point—could have been armed).

That was not just to be nice to Khrushchev, or because Ike wanted to secure his internal politics. Publicity would have forced him to complain internationally, at the UN, and perhaps to take counter-measures elsewhere to reciprocate. It would have complicated our relationships in unpredictable ways. It might have forced him to make an even greater crash effort to develop his SAMS (though that was probably moving with the highest priority anyway).

Still, none of these reasons were compelling enough, all together, to have forced Ike to keep that secret: yet, for whatever reason, he had. He had even lied about it when a SAM finally shot down Gary Powers and ended the program over the SU. (It continued elsewhere, including Cuba, for years: still unannounced and with high secrecy, even after the Corona satellites began operating). The revelation of the lie

by Khrushchev—who had at first concealed that he had Powers alive, encouraging Ike to lie, then announced it publicly—turned out to be costly to both sides. The first (!) public revelation of a presidential lie caused shock in the US and much discussion, not to the favor of Eisenhower's reputation (though not fatal either). And Eisenhower's refusal either to apologize or to promise an end to the flights (even though he did secretly end them) at the Paris Summit soon after led to the breakup of the Summit, amid Khrushchev's show of anger. There are strong indications that Eisenhower had intended to make significant concessions on Berlin at the Summit; so the timing of the revelation was not to Khrushchev's advantage after all.

Thus, K had surely learned something from this episode. In a supposedly open society, the US Government could keep a significant secret for years, despite many people knowing it. That he could do the same was no secret from anyone; but he knew that the US president knew that he knew...and that both of them could "trust" and rely on the other to keep a mutual secret from others which at least one of them could gain some political benefit from revealing.

That's a relationship. A kind of intimacy, shared by two heads of state supposedly in total opposition, unknown (in its nature, and in the very existence of such a "bond") to nearly everyone in their own governments and to virtually anyone in their publics.

A similar one was the existence of secret, direct correspondence between the two, supposedly more personal in nature, not subject to the usual, institutional coordination and consultation of their diplomatic messages and certainly not sent through normal diplomatic channels, very closely held at both sides (limiting drastically the number who would see it, or who might ask about it and ask to see it). Heads of two rival empires, ideological foes, players in a two-person zero-sum game: pen-pals!

The existence of such correspondence became known to journalists and the public with the leaks from the October 26, "long, rambling" message from Khrushchev to Kennedy. (I read that Friday night at the Pentagon, as it came in sections). During my study of nuclear crises in 1964, I was granted access to the "Eyes Only" vault at the State Department, a safe-like room with a table, for note-taking, and shelves lined with file-boxes on the shelves marked, among others, Kennedy-Khrushchev letters, Eisenhower-Khrushchev letters, Eisenhower-Bulganin letters.

I was able to look through these at will. Amazing stuff. Little truly personal, after all, but a heart-pounding experience to sit alone in that crypt, under fluorescent light, opening pages that had been held personally by the opposed heads of state, artifacts of relationships that were otherwise simply hard to imagine during the Cold War (still at its height as I read). What I was discovering, of course, was that the possibility of "back channel" communication between two such heads of state (like the "Nicky-Willy" letters between the cousins Tsar Nicholas and Kaiser

Wilhelm) had not ended with the First World War and had not begun with Khrushchev and Kennedy during the Missile Crisis.

The point here is that the very possibility, existence and channels of this correspondence, along with its contents, was a well-kept secret within each of the respective governments and from their publics, but known by each of the heads of state and known by each to be kept secret by the other. Another secret they shared, almost alone.

Such “back channel” communications, kept secret by each from high-level officials in their respective governments who would ordinarily expect to be involved in such inter-governmental communications but who might object to certain aspects of this (or who might inadvertently leak it to others who might object), played a key role in events leading up the crisis and during it. In theory, it could allow one of them to express something—a promise, a warning, a threat--with unusually high credibility that it reflected his personal conviction, commitment, honor and trustworthiness..

He might conceivably even reveal to the “adversary” domestic political or bureaucratic pressures and rivalries that he could not reveal to most of his own colleagues on pain of losing his own prestige and office. In America, there is a fundamental myth that considerations of domestic politics should not and do not influence foreign and defense policy. The reality that presidential decisions in those areas are in fact saturated with such considerations at all times is one of our most closely guarded secrets, almost *never* even alluded to in official, written communications, including transcripts, no matter the level of classification. Even these most-secret letters, being written, did not break with this rule. But oral back-channel, “unofficial” transmissions did so, in the crisis, as we’ll see.

Khrushchev’s son Sergei recalls that there was another aspect of the U-2 episode that influenced his father in the crisis: K’s memory that Eisenhower had lied. “Lied to him,” as Sergei recounted it: which Khrushchev saw as a precedent for his own lies through various back-channels, and publicly, to Kennedy about his intentions and then about the presence of missiles in Cuba. He actually seemed to think, as Sergei tells it, that these previous lies absolved his own deception, and should have ensured him against any real resentment by Kennedy.

If Sergei was right about this, he and his father both seemed to have missed crucial differences. Ike’s lies were not to Khrushchev personally, they were asserted (first, through official statements and leaks) to the world, and the American public directly. (From the point of view of the government, they were “ordinary” lies to cover an intelligence operation; the surprising public reaction by the American public reflected the fact that it was the first time the truth had finally been acknowledged by the government itself).

Ike had not lied to Khrushchev in a personal message (as, in the State Department folders I examined in 1964). Those were supposed to be private and “candid,”

however much help each one got from aides in drafting them. K knew what he was doing when he told Georgi Bolshakov personally, along with Malinovsky, to tell RFK that they were not sending ground-to-ground missiles to Cuba that could reach the US. He meant that to be exceptionally influential on JFK's opinion, and it had that effect, causing those close to Kennedy to discount contrary evidence and rumors, even by their head of CIA, John McCone (who probably did not know of the Bolshakov channel or messages!) Likewise when Ambassador Dobrynin conveyed the same message to JFK personally, as a personal message from Khrushchev. Khrushchev seems not to have considered the effects this "abuse" of the private channels could be expected to have on the brothers' subsequent decision-making: discussed later.

6/5/12 [note later: I didn't review the above before writing what follows, so there's some repetition.]

But there were two peculiar aspects to the messages Khrushchev was sending to the Kennedys in the late summer and fall of 1962. Virtually every one of them referred –ostensibly, solicitously--to the upcoming Congressional elections in November. First, they assured Kennedy, through various recipients, that he would do nothing to make trouble for Kennedy before the election. As if he cared; as if they were, in some degree, partners, as if he shared an interest in Kennedy's fortunes in Congress.

What was very odd about that message was, as the third parties who were told this (RFK, Sorensen, Salinger(?), Thompson (?))—or Kennedy himself, when he heard this from Gromyko or Dobrynin-- all pointed out, he already *was* making trouble for Kennedy in the elections, lots of trouble, with the unprecedented flow of "defensive" equipment to Cuba (unmotivated, as far as the American public was aware). The Republicans were seizing on that as the main issue in the upcoming elections: the challenge to the U.S. to blockade that or respond to it, a challenge JFK appeared to be shirking.

What more *could* he do to embarrass the president before the elections—except send offensive ground-to-ground missiles, which, they were being assured, he wouldn't do? It seemed to be a promise without substantive content, hot air.

On the other hand, the same messages warned Kennedy that pressure from Moscow to settle the Berlin issue *was* coming shortly, right *after* the election, later in November. Gromyko put it most starkly: if there wasn't progress, Krushchev *would* sign a peace treaty with East Germany and the basis for Western troops in Berlin would be abrogated. They must leave Berlin, like a "rotten tooth that must be pulled out."

But why all these warnings, in August, September, October? Hadn't they been all through this just a year ago? How had the situation changed? Except that, on the one hand, the So viets' strategic inferiority had been exposed, and on the other, the Wall seemed to have resolved Khrushchev's most pressing problem. (Indeed, soon

after the missile crisis, Khrushchev told a visitor that after the Wall, he was “quite comfortable” with the German situation. It may have been sour grapes by that time, but it was plausible. Had he ever really meant to reopen the Berlin question in November—he didn’t do it—or was that dependent on a different ending to the crisis?

Or might the warning have a different purpose—to help *bring about* a different ending to the missile crisis—which might or might not then be exploited in a new Berlin crisis? What if the meaning Khrushchev had intended Kennedy to understand retrospectively in these multiple, repetitive, cryptic messages—recalling them at the moment he might have become aware of evidence or proof that MRBMs were being installed in Cuba-- was: I won’t make a crisis for you by *revealing* the presence of the offensive missiles before the election, *if you don’t, either*. But *if you do, you’ll have a Berlin crisis too*.

Further: “You’re already being pressed to blockade Cuba. If you reveal publicly your evidence that we’re constructing an offensive missile base in Cuba—that your September warnings have been ignored—that pressure will become immense. But if you then blockade Cuba, we blockade Berlin. If you invade and occupy Cuba, Berlin will be overrun and occupied. All this before your election, if and only if you make trouble for yourself by revealing your secretly-acquired intelligence. Do that and you won’t just have one crisis—which you could have postponed or avoided-- you’ll have *two* crises before the election.”

The point of all this would be to deter Kennedy from confirming publicly whatever indications he have gained from refugees or surveillance before the election. That period—from early September to late October—corresponded precisely to the period of greatest vulnerability of the missiles after they arrived in Cuba, before they were operational.

Whichever side revealed them after that—Khrushchev’s plan, and apparently, his expectation, was to do it himself in Cuba and the UN in November—they would pose too great a danger of launch under attack to be threatened or struck. There would be no crisis, because it would be too late for the US to do anything about them. It would be a successful *fait accompli*.

This was the hypothesis I came to in my study in 1964. It’s not one that one would think of unless you were one of the few who knew—as I came to know at that time—that President Kennedy *had, in fact, taken extraordinary, unprecedented steps to keep secret* any bits of incoming intelligence that might suggest that his public warnings had been defied (see below).

Might Khrushchev have anticipated that very behavior—hoping by his combined reassurance-plus-warnings to encourage it—allowing Kennedy to keep the presence of offensive weapons, if he discovered them, secret until after the elections had passed? Hoping—if not counting on--that this “cooperative” behavior would

protect the missiles from attack during their most vulnerable phase after transport. What is clear is that, whether it was deliberate or not, that phase was scheduled to occur in the weeks just before the election.

If he counted on that to protect his *fait accompli*, he miscalculated. Indeed, it could have backfired badly, and almost did: either tipping Kennedy into an attack he would otherwise have avoided; or playing into his hands by giving him an election-winning crisis just before the voting.

Some Republicans, including Senator Norris Cotton, had been predicting just such an "October surprise," and he along with Senators Thomas Curtis and Barry Goldwater quickly interpreted Kennedy's speech and blockade as confirming that prediction and serving as a domestic political stratagem.

The urgent military contingency planning McNamara had directed on October 1 with a deadline for maximum readiness of October 20—if known by the Republicans—would have looked like smoking gun evidence of such intentions. And it does indicate serious presidential consideration of such an operation before the election, especially since the second in a list of events that might trigger it was discovery of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba. (The first was a Soviet move on Berlin: in case *that* reassurance, of no action before the election, should prove false!)

So it might well have occurred to Khrushchev—though it doesn't seem to have done so—that the prospect of an election might reinforce or speed up an attack on the missiles if they were discovered just before the election, rather than delay it. discovery of the missiles before the election—rather than being concealed—might actually confirm or speed up an attack or invasion.

That's more or less what did happen; except that the discovery was delayed until it appeared that one or more of the missiles might already be operational. If U-2 flights had occurred throughout September—as the intelligence community, and McCone in particular, had urged—and the site-preparing and construction had been spotted two or three weeks earlier, perhaps even one week, Kennedy's initial inclination to destroy them very quickly would probably have been carried out. (Followed by an invasion, that would run into 42,000 Soviet troops and tactical nuclear weapons).

But was this course of events inevitable? Should Khrushchev have regarded it as highly probable, at least? (Mikoyan apparently did; but he seems to have been alone, at high levels). If Khrushchev, rather, entertained the contrary expectation above, such a hope would not have been as unreasonable as it would appear to the uninitiated.

As he knew, it was not only his own authoritarian system that could keep secrets—known to an adversary—from his own public and allies. It had been possible for Eisenhower, president in a democracy, to keep totally secret for long periods U.S.

covert activities—of which the U-2 program was only one—well known to the Soviets; and to keep secret results of those activities, the U-2 photos and what they revealed to him. He had kept these secret—even when it might have served him to reveal them--to avoid provoking unwelcome response from his adversary, who was also keeping the secret. And he had lied about them: knowing that his adversary knew he was lying. Why couldn't Kennedy do the same?

Well, in the first place, he couldn't keep *this* secret very long, no matter how closely it was guarded, with special clearances (which Kennedy did institute). He couldn't keep it the way that Eisenhower had been able to keep the U-2 (and Corona program) secret: because in those cases, the military and intelligence people who had the clearances and knew the secret had no incentive to reveal it. On the contrary, they would have expected that an international outcry if these programs were revealed would have led to cancelling them, which they didn't want.

(For the same reason, LBJ could later count on the secrets of the covert 34A operations against North Vietnam and the planning for air attacks on North Vietnam being kept very reliably by those who knew them—including his opponent Senator Barry Goldwater, who knew through his active duty service as a Reserve Air Force general, and the many others who preferred Goldwater's candidacy in 1964 and knew that it would be helped by these revelations—because they *wanted* the attacks to be “provoked” and to be carried out, rather than cancelled.

In this case, the secret, if revealed, would serve as the provocation the hawks needed, in the eyes of the public, to make pressure for an attack and invasion irresistible. That secret couldn't be kept for long without leaking, no matter how many special clearances were laid on. Not, especially, when the Director of Central Intelligence was a Republican, and a hawk. (The Kennedys may have underestimated McCone's institutional loyalty. He doesn't seem to have been the source of Senator Keating's assertions about missiles on October 10, though he was surely high on the list of suspects).

There is at least one report of the crisis (FIND THIS) that says that Kennedy's first question of McGeorge Bundy on October 16, on being told of the photos, was: “Can this be held until the election?” Three weeks? That may or may not be true. In any case Bundy told him—in answer to his question about leak-time, whether or not it took that precise form—that it was about a week, at most.²

As it was, Bundy and the Kennedys were pleasantly surprised that *this* secret (and their deliberations) held about that long, though *not* because no major secrets held up much longer. (The U-2 flights over Cuba themselves had already stayed secret

² (Would Kennedy have informed as many officials as he did—by constituting the ExComm, many of whom were already cleared for PSALM but several who were not, plus their immediate staffs—if he hadn't been given that short deadline?)

much longer; other matters in the crisis, such as JFK's openness to a trade of the Turkish missiles, remained secret for a quarter of a century).

Was K crazy to attempt to make Cuba a Soviet missile base and to protect Cuba from US invasion? As I see it, he came very close to achieving both. With "slightly" different tactics or circumstances, he could have won: either achieved both of these aims, keeping MRBMs (and ultimately many IRBMs) in Cuba and preventing invasion, or achieving a public trade of missiles in Turkey and Cuba, along with strong no-invasion and no-covert-action pledges from the US. (Perhaps, even limits on Guantanamo, or removal!)

Or, with a significantly different strategy—schedule of operations—he could have achieved the former, winning on both counts. (no trade)

Simply revealing the tac nucs and troops, either early after their arrival (and the arrival of missiles and warheads, to forestall blockade) or when invasion seemed imminent (Thursday, Friday, Saturday) would, I believe, have forestalled an invasion, permanently. And done so, for the long run, better than any US guarantee could do. K's failure to plan to do this, and his actual failure to do it, are *both* inexplicable: verging on **crazy**, though it seems to have been an approach that drew no criticism from the Presidium or Soviet military.

(Definitely crazy: deploying them there—initially with delegated authorization to use them, later with ambiguous or unreliable control—*without* revealing them to the US, not only, in the actual event, lost the crisis for Khrushchev; it could have led to general war, the annihilation of Cuba and Soviet forces and a first-strike by the US (after first-use by Soviets in Cuba) against the SU. This could well have occurred if shooting, first by Castro then by the US, had gotten underway before K had withdrawn. This could have happened on Saturday, and would have, if JFK had not overridden virtually all of his advisors.

Though: striking a single SAM site, as most advised that night, would probably not have set off the whole escalation, by itself. It would simply have hastened K's retreat, or reinforced his determination to retreat that he had already decided on.

It's not even clear to me why JFK did decide against this. Was he afraid that killing some Soviets would harden K against any deal, such as he was proposing through RFK? It could be argued equally well that it would increase the chances of K's making a deal. That is probably true, given that K knew he had not ordered the SAM shootdown, and was understandably worried that it would result in at least a limited US response.

However, none of the ExComm realized that. They saw the SAM attack as an escalation by K; accompanying his "harder line" on Turkey (actually, a response to an offer by RFK and JFK, which ExComm didn't know. That offer was given, Thursday night, before receiving the "softer offer" of K on Friday night.) So JFK,

agreeing with this, may have thought that if he was still going to try to achieve a better deal than the public trade—if he was going to try to get the Friday night deal (the final outcome) by adding a sweetener of a private trade—he couldn’t afford to kill any Soviets at a SAM site. (If the shooting had been by Cubans—as K thought it was!—and JFK had known that, he might well have attacked a Cuban site, especially if it could have been identified as the one that had attacked the US plane).

Revealing the tac nucs would not, by itself, protect the MRBMs from air attack. The uncertainty as to whether one or more might be operational did do that—with respect to JFK and McNamara—though not in the eyes of the hawks or the JCS. But that was a result of the unpredictable failure of the US to discover them prior to Oct. 14. Accepting the risk of an earlier discovery was the most “questionable” aspect of K’s decisions, bordering on crazy, certainly reckless: given what he actually did.

Even so, he almost won that gamble. (So, it wasn’t “inevitable” that he would lose as he did, or worse, bring on general war. It wasn’t even, probably, as risky as Mikoyan thought it was, initially. But Mikoyan certainly wasn’t off base.) Given the crisis up through Saturday, JFK was ready to give in to the public trade and no-invasion pledge, a considerable victory for K strategically (say, going into a Berlin negotiation, with NATO and US leadership weakened, NATO confidence in US determination over Berlin greatly weakened: even though no change in the strategic balance, a general appreciation that it did not amount to significant superiority for the US, given the outcome! (I.e., the way that JFK and McNamara actually thought, in opposition to the JCS and perhaps Nitze).

If K could have persuaded Castro to cease firing on American recon on Sunday (and Monday), if he could have felt confident that would hold, then he could and probably would have replied to RFK’s Saturday night offer (and JFK’s letter) by reiterating his demand for a public trade, made Saturday morning (which JFK so far was ignoring). And JFK would have yielded: to U Thant, who (induced by JFK/Cordier) would have made the same proposal.

That would have been difficult, not certain: Castro was adamant. But surely not impossible. (“Negotiation is going on; downing another American plane will prejudice it dangerously. You’ve got to give me this.”) Hmmn. Saturday night is certainly too late for that. During the day Saturday (evening in Moscow) would give it a chance. Better, before the firing at all, Friday night (Saturday morning in Moscow). But wait a minute: K didn’t want to tell Castro he was “negotiating,” especially for a public trade of the missiles (unless, perhaps, he could have emphasized that the tac nucs and troops would remain: the missiles were between him and the US, not essential to protecting Cuba), or merely for a “pledge” from the US (that wasn’t either sufficient, nor necessary if the tac nucs would remain!) (The real issue of how Cuba was to be defended wasn’t part of the dialog between the US and USSR, since the US didn’t know about the tac nucs and K didn’t tell them!)

(Why, after all, were tac nucs so strong for defending Cuba? Precisely because of the risk or likelihood that they would be used “crazily, suicidally” either by Soviet units, even against orders, or by Cubans if they controlled them. This behavior was not merely possible—credible—but actually likely! As in Europe, with NATO tac nucs (and for that matter, Soviet tac nucs: as Ike saw it, probably correctly).

This is “normal, predictable, human craziness” in our species. It seems, for at least many “responsible, powerful” human officials (the military, some civilians), to hold even when the result is not merely suicidal but omnicidal. That prospect does not ensure that threats to bring it about are total bluffs or wholly incredible, nor that bluffs will not lead to catastrophe.

That’s why nuclear threats—even against a NWS, or an ally of an NWS—*are* credible, usable, and are used (at great risk): contrary to those who regard them as usable only to deter nuclear attack. (As NATO under Ike put it: nuclear response to nuclear attack is “automatic”: against non-nuclear challenge, a matter of decision by political authorities, if time and communications permit.)

10:33 AM

Wednesday, June 6, 12: notes.

[Cline interview. Mikoyan. Beschloss. Why it may have reduced K's sense of risk. What Gromyko may have inferred from failure of JFK to confront him or ask pointed questions: either he knew—and ploy was working—or he didn't know, yet. Likewise from Sept. 13 warning (despite Sept. 11 alert). (Warning, only, may have reassured rather than alarmed! If they thought he did know already!) Why delay in recon? What Cline and Sorensen thought about Sept. 3 warning; McNamara on that. (Check hsr report). Effect of McCone: there and not there.)

JFK may have kept secret in order to have October surprise; (not to keep secret until after election).

"We won't move on Berlin before the election—UNLESS something comes up." (But why then say they will move after election—apparently, even if JFK doesn't start something before the election? Then he doesn't have so much to lose if he moves even before the election: that's the way that RFK and others did reason. K definitely doesn't seem to have foreseen how his deception would enrage the Kennedys: though in the end, that didn't affect their action all that much (if, as I believe, JFK meant to give in, anyway): except to make their initial preparations for invasion so plausible as to frighten Castro and K.)

Wednesday, June 6, 12, 8:45 AM

Psalm system (and Funnel): how it misled JFK. (Hence? Delay in U-2 until Oct. 9 (JCS probably convinced missiles by Oct. 1 at latest). Decision not to attack Cuba for 3 months, "unless": Oct. 15. If discovered a week or more earlier... (see file on Secrecy)

(see file on crazy choices) 6/6/12 9:04 AM

[Not all "greatly, tragically mistaken" premises/decisions are "crazy." Were those leading up to WWI crazy? All of them? Which ones? (No one, for example, foresaw the resilience of the economies, chance of prolonged war; or effects of machine-guns (except Ivan ...?) , trenches...)]

K's choices leading up to C-II were somewhat reckless (lack of "exit strategy" if discovered, no Track II) but were they crazy? I'm arguing: not as much as appeared; not clearly crazy (they almost won! Missiles were NOT discovered until at least one might be operational: that was enough to stop JFK, privately, though not others: including the VP, who DID become president one year later! (See RFK on the half dozen who would have blown up the world. Including Dillon, who JFK was willing to see president! McCone? (head of CIA, earlier AEC;) (not, McN, R; Bundy?) Not the JCS! (As usual, mad dogs).